

## 2004 Ethics Survey/Quiz Report

### Background

During 2003, the ethics office developed a set of ethics-related materials to raise awareness of the Code of Ethics, the Board of Ethics, the ethics office, and the services they provide. In early 2004, the Board distributed posters throughout county offices and operations facilities, and county employees received Ethics Help Line cards. Later in October, the ethics administrator and three DNRP employees developed and conducted a survey/quiz to determine the extent to which employees recalled seeing the marketing materials, and to learn how much they knew about the Code of Ethics.

### Survey Distribution

On October 5, 2004, the executive alerted King County department directors and separately elected officials of the upcoming ethics survey/quiz. On October 12, the executive sent a county-wide email to all employees asking them to participate in the survey/quiz via a Web link. The broadcast email was quickly followed by a second brief message with Web link via the county-wide employee messaging system.

Over 11,000 employees received these on-line messages; the administrator sent 2,785 hard copies to certain department supervisors for distribution to employees with limited computer access. *(Note: there are no data on how many of the 2,785 hard copies actually reached employees.)*

Distribution Method	# Distributed	% of Total
• Email distribution:	11,017	80%
• Hard copy distribution:	2,785	20%
• <b>Total Distribution:</b>	<b>13,802</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Response Rates

Of the 11,017 online surveys, 2,706 employees participated for a 25% rate; 153, or 6% of the 2,785 hardcopy survey/quizzes, were returned. Again, we do not know how many individual employees actually received the hard copy. The overall response rate is approximately 21%.

### Response Rate

- Online response rate: 25%
- Hard copy response rate: 6%
- **Overall response rate: 21%**

Because participation was voluntary, we do not know how representative the responses are of all employees. Despite this fact, this is a large sample size. If the sampling were random, the margin of error would be  $\pm 1.8\%$  at the 95% confidence interval.

### Respondent Knowledge

Correct responses to all questions were exceptionally high.

- **Five of the six questions received more than 90% correct answers.**  
*(Question #7 had multiple correct responses.)*
- In question #4, the acceptance of the ceremonial plaque presented a dilemma; the correct answer was 'okay to accept', but 46% of the respondents believed that they would not be allowed to accept the plaque. Although not an accurate

answer, this response indicates employees may have an even more restrictive view of receiving gifts than the ethics code allows.

- In question #7 regarding topics included in the Code of Ethics, 55% of respondents believe that 'workplace harassment' and 44% believe that 'disciplinary actions' are under the jurisdiction of the code. They are not, but this may present educational opportunities for the responsible agencies.

### **Ethics Help Line Card and Poster Awareness**

In February 2004, the ethics administrator distributed Ethics Help Line cards to all county employees via the county payroll system. However, based on employee comments, it soon became evident a significant number of employees had not received the cards. The administrator made subsequent efforts over the next three months to work with department directors, human resources staff, and payroll personnel to attempt distribution to all employees.

The ethics administrator coordinated with personnel designated by department leaders to ensure voluntary distribution of the ethics poster in March.

The distribution resulted in a decidedly mixed picture, with about half, or less, of employees having seen the poster or the Help Line card.

- **Two-thirds (66%) of respondents *do not* have, or *do not know* if they have, an Ethics Help Line card**
- **Half (48%) of respondents *have not* seen, or *do not know* if they have seen, an ethics poster in their department**

### **Demographics**

Do You Supervise Others?

- One-quarter (26%) are supervisors
- Three-quarters (74%) do not supervise others

What Is Your Department? (*on-line respondents only; reflects only those who provided this information*)

Department	% employee to total county employees	# of respondents from each department	% of total respondents
Transportation	35%	443	18%
Natural Resources & Parks	13%	417	16.6%
Public Health	12%	411	16.4%
Executive Services	10%	254	10%
Adult and Juvenile Detention	6%	173	7%
Sheriff's Office	7%	165	6.6%
Community & Human Services	3%	103	4%
Superior Court	3%	101	4%
Prosecuting Attorney's Office	4%	89	3.5%
Development & Environmental Services	2%	86	3.5%
Assessments	2%	78	3%
Executive's Office	.35%	57	2.2%
Judicial Administration	1%	56	2.2%
District Court	1.5%	50	2%
County Council	1%	28	1%

Generally, the number of respondents per department matched the department's relative employee population within county government.

### **Respondent Comments**

**Over 260 (9%) of respondents wrote comments.** Listed in the order of number of comments received, here are the top 12 comment categories:

- Positive – for quiz, ethics card & poster
- Alleged unethical behavior by management/leadership
- Specific ethics dilemma in workplace
- Requested information on ethics issue, card, or poster
- Quiz too easy
- Suggest ethics training for agency, county
- How did I do? How did we do as a county?
- Ethics code and policies too strict
- Allege unfair treatment in workplace
- Alleged lack of enforcement for ethics violations
- Positive – for ethics office
- Positive – for King County's ethical environment

### **Requests for Contact**

**Four percent** or 117 respondents indicated a **desire to be contacted** by the ethics office. Requests included: requiring more ethics information, personal survey score, positive feedback, and requests for guidance on specific ethics-related issues

### **Conclusions**

- The high number of correct responses on the Ethics Quiz indicates that county employees have a strong basic-level understanding of simple, key ethics issues.
- Through employee comments and requests to be contacted, we learned that a significant number of employees have a need and/or desire to communicate on ethics matters.
- There is more work to do if we want to ensure that all employees have an Ethics Help Line card, a key vehicle for encouraging employees to seek advice and to contact the Ethics Office for assistance.
- The Board now has more information about 1) awareness of recently distributed ethics materials; 2) the employees' general knowledge of the ethics code; and 3) how employees respond to common ethical dilemmas.

### **Lessons Learned**

- The on-line survey/quiz method is a cost-effective, positive vehicle to raise awareness and provide ethics education among employees; hard copy distribution is more expensive and uncertain about whether or not they reach target employees or that employees will fill out hard copy surveys.
- There was some anecdotal information that not all of the poster and/or cards were distributed according to the Ethics Office request. Distribution of materials must have complete buy-in and coordination from top leadership so that all employees actually receive the materials in a timely way. Significant county resources, including staff time and ethics office funds, are wasted when distribution systems fail.

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